

The Gospel – a Message of Peace

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The Gospel is and contains a message of peace. The angelic host proclaimed “peace on earth” at Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:14). He is called the “Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6) and the “Lord of peace” (2 The. 3:16), and His Father is the “God of peace” (Rom. 15:33). Jesus the Christ reigns over a kingdom of peace (14:17), which is governed by the “gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). Jesus pronounced a blessing upon those who seek to create peace (Mat. 5:9).

There is no atmosphere so wonderful and attractive as one of peace, whether in the home, the church, or the nation. Genuine and lasting peace is possible only when it flows from the Divine spring of inspired Truth. God-ordained peace is created and preserved only when men are “perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” and as they are governed by God’s Word (1 Cor. 1:10). Only then can it and will it do its peacemaking work.

All of these truths have their root in one great principle: “For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). Even a simpleton could hardly fail to understand that God’s way is one that seeks peace, first between men and Himself, and then among all men. One of the most compelling attractions of Heaven is the Gospel’s depiction of its perfectly peaceful atmosphere (Rev. 21:3–4; 25–27; 22:1–5).

One of the several paradoxes of the Gospel, however, is that it is simultaneously a message of conflict and division. The Prince of peace warned that He came to “cast fire upon the earth” and to cause division rather than peace (Luke 12:49–51). When He first sent the apostles out, they were to go, spreading peace (Mat. 10:13). He warned them, however, that the message of peace itself would stir up enmity, strife, and opposition, which would lead to their arrest, to betrayal even by their own kindred, and to persecution and hatred in general (vv. 16–37).

The Prince of peace was so despised for His mighty words and works that His enemies crucified him. Not long after the Gospel was first preached on Pentecost, the promised conflict began to rage. First came arrests, then warnings, then beatings. Then the callous murder of Stephen sparked a general wave of persecution under the leadership of the young Saul of Tarsus. Herod executed the apostle James and apparently planned to do the same with the imprisoned Peter. Ironically, all of this very “unpeaceful” behavior resulted from the preaching of the Gospel of peace.

When Saul obeyed the Gospel, he almost immediately found himself on the receiving end of that which he had been administering. He barely escaped Damascus with his life, and later the saints in Jerusalem secreted him out of their city to foil a similar plot to kill him. In his remarkable series of travels with the Gospel, everywhere he went, his preaching aroused opposition, some of it riotous and life-threatening. The apostle and his companions had a reputation as those “that had turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6), all because they preached the message of peace.

Imperial Rome, over a span of more than two centuries, sought to obliterate the religion whose members refused to worship the emperor. Only God knows how many have paid with their blood through the centuries for preaching and living so as to be God’s peacemakers. Opposition and peace breaking have come in varied forms through the centuries, but they have always been (and will always be) present in some form for God’s faithful people (2 Tim. 3:12).

Perhaps this conflict-causing element of the Gospel is the reason the Holy Spirit describes His Word not as a butter knife, but as a sword (Eph. 6:17). Butter knives are made to spread butter. Swords are made for conflict—to advance and/or defend a cause in combat. They have to do with war and division, rather than peace. The Gospel is therefore as much a weapon of war as it is a peace treaty.

While God willed the Gospel for peace, He knew that man’s stubborn will would generally oppose it because it made demands of him that he would be unwilling to meet. Rather than conforming their conduct to the message, most men choose either to ignore it or to oppose the messenger, thus creating conflict.

We should neither be surprised or shocked when men (both in the world and in the church) react negatively to the Truth. The opposition they mount and the division they cause is a graphic demonstration of their rebellion against God. They are but playing out the drama of conflict that God’s Word has produced from time immemorial. If ungodly people (whether within or without) do not oppose the message I preach and the life I live, I am miserably failing in my efforts to preach and live the Gospel. We are not so much to beware when all men oppose us as we are when they all speak well of us (Luke 6:26).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for the October 2003 edition of *The Gospel Journal*, of which I was editor at the time. Other material crowded it out; consequently, it was never published.]

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